

Whether it be their song, beauty markings or simply their power of flight, birds have delighted and inspired people the world over. We mimic their calls and envy their travel. From a bird's eye view, South Carolina is a paradise of great swaths of forests, protected habitats and people who care for our winged and beaked buddies.

# A Bird's Eye View

By Warren Florence

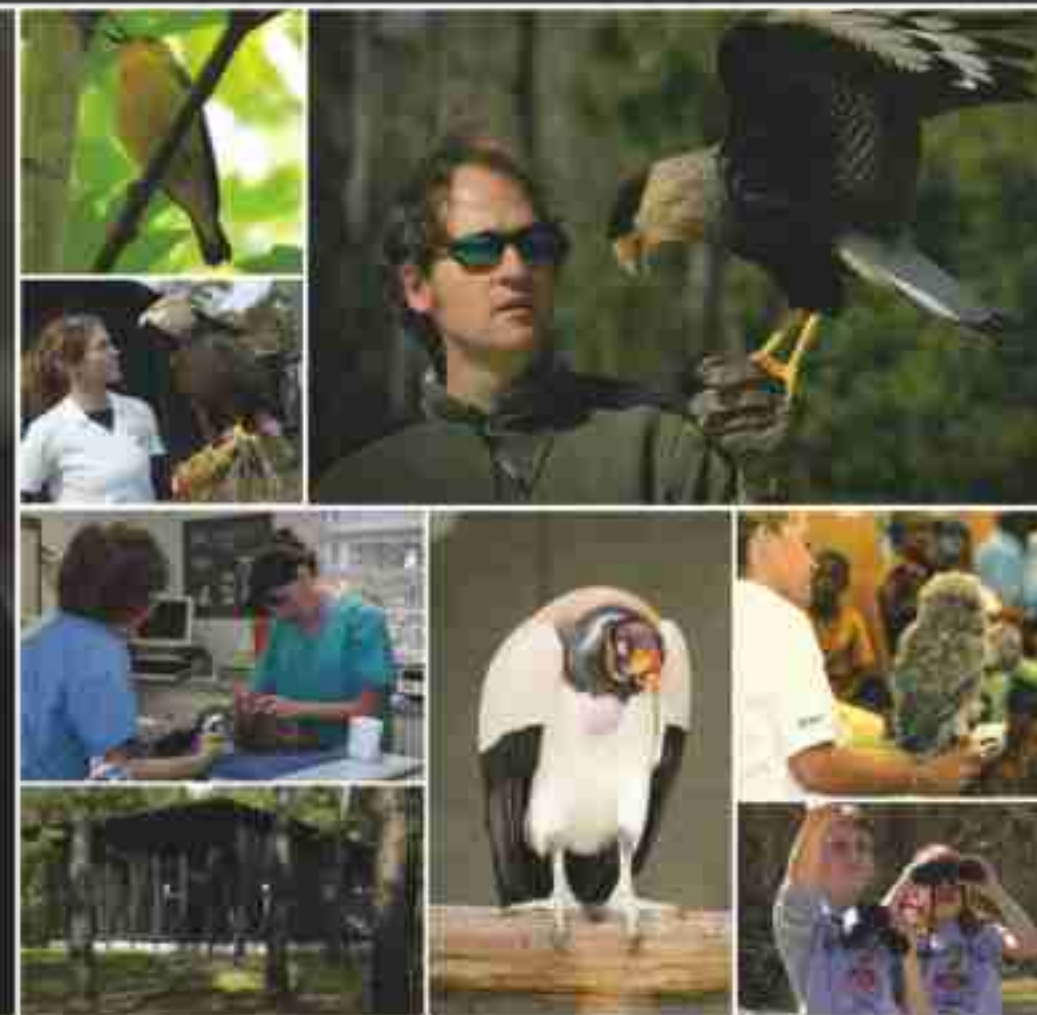
## SILVER BLUFF AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY

Tucked away some 18 miles south of Aiken, SC, is Silver Bluff Audubon Center, a 3,154-acre working forest preserve. The state's second fully functioning Audubon center, this is one birding destination you simply can't pass up. The sanctuary has a checklist of over 200 species, with 50 to 75 species in residence at any given time. The numbers rise even higher during spring and fall migrations.

Why is this area a draw for so many species? The habitat extends from grassland to mature hardwood bottomland and includes nearly three miles of river frontage along the Savannah River. And the big draw...it holds 30 acres of ponds which are lowered to manage the feeding of wood storks—a federally endangered species—in July and August. At one time the center counted up to 457 of these primitive, 3.5-foot-tall wading birds that use their 18-inch bill to snap up meals. Around the ponds you'll find other wading birds—great egrets, blue herons, white ibis and a host of smaller

shore birds probing the mud for food. If that isn't enough, the property also keeps a close eye on a pair of bald eagles that have chosen the area as a place to call home—even hatching their young here—since 1994.

More than a birding destination, the property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was the location of George Galphin's Colonial trading post from the 1750s until the end of the Revolutionary War. A two-mile interpretive walking trail and other shorter trails are open 9am-5pm Monday through Saturday. The visitor center is undergoing a major renovation and visitors are advised to call ahead for current operating hours.



## THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY

The International Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw, SC, near Charleston will focus on the study and welfare of birds and their habitats. When it opens to the public in 2007, the center will house one of the largest collections of eagles, hawks, vultures, osprey and other meat eaters.

The 152-acre center is filled with a variety of birds of prey, classrooms and laboratories for all levels of learning. This facility will host hands-on laboratories, walking tours and displays of avian anatomy, making it one of the world's most significant centers for raptor education and research.

The campus includes two flying fields where visitors can observe trained raptors free flying and simulating their natural hunting skills. You'll find these very large birds soaring over your head a compelling and profound learning experience. But don't let the size and reputation of these birds frighten you. Enclosures are subtly built into the landscape to protect visitors from "ruffled feathers" so

to speak while maintaining as natural a habitat as possible.

A primary focus of the facility will remain its existing Medical Clinic, which has provided the most advanced level of medical care for more than 4,000 injured or orphaned birds of prey, ensuring the highest probability of release for each bird treated. Currently, it's treating nearly 400 injured birds of prey annually. Eagle Island, surrounded by a man-made lake, is another key component of the center's operations. Here, the center cares for eagles that are permanently injured and not released.

The center is open on a limited basis for groups only, with prior reservations.